EDITORIAL RESEARCH REPORTS

1960
Vol. I

SOIL CONSERVATION AND CROP SURPLUSES

by

F. Yorick Blumenfeld

	Page
SOIL CONSERVATION PLANS AND PURPOSES	81
Crop Surplus Question in Political Campaign	81
Conservation Approach to Surplus Problem	82
Soil Bank Program to Help Reduce Surpluses	83
A.C.P. Plan for Conserving Farm Resources	85
Activities of the Soil Conservation Service	86
RISE OF SOIL CONSERVATION MOVEMENT	87
Rapid Growth of Soil Conservation Practices	87
T.V.A.'s Experimental Conservation Program	88
Soil Reclamation and Agricultural Surpluses	89
FUTURE OF SOIL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS	90
Need to Conserve Nation's Natural Resources	90
Current Proposals to Enlarge the Soil Bank	91
Mandatory Soil Conservation to Cut Surpluses	93

No. 5
Feb. 3

THE right to reproduce material contained in *Editorial Research Reports* is strictly reserved to the newspaper clients of the service. Verbatim use of such material by others will be permitted only upon written authorization of the editor.

RICHARD M. BOECKEL, *Editor*

Editorial Research Reports
1156 Nineteenth Street, N.W.
Washington

SOIL CONSERVATION AND CROP SURPLUSES

ENDLESS DISCUSSION about how to solve the problem of mounting crop surpluses and declining farm prices will mark the coming election campaign. Whether it will lead to adoption of a farm program likely to ease pressures on either the farmer or the taxpayer is another matter. President Eisenhower said in his budget message for the fiscal year 1961, transmitted to Congress on Jan. 18, that "Federal programs for agriculture will again have a heavy impact on the budget, primarily because of continued high agricultural production and the past unwillingness of the Congress to make the adjustments in production needed to permit relaxation of government controls over farm operations."

Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson said on the TV-radio program *Meet the Press* on Jan. 17 that it was "rather tragic the way we have permitted these surpluses to accumulate at great cost to the taxpayer." At Ithaca, N.Y., last March 24 Benson had called the present farm program "the most costly, irrational, hodge-podge program ever patched together." Democrats, on the other hand, accuse the Secretary of having administered the program improperly.[1]

Each party thus tries to saddle on the other the responsibility for failure to curtail agricultural surpluses. The value of surplus crops held in storage under price-support operations is expected to reach the unprecedented total of $10 billion in 1960.

Political leaders and agricultural experts agree that the most to be expected from Congress in this election year, in the way of action to reduce surpluses, is a modest expan-

[1] Democrats are currently blaming the Republican administration for the high cost of farm products to consumers despite abundant production; for declining farm income (net income in 1959 was estimated at $2,476 per farm, down 17 per cent from 1958); and for increasing burdens on the taxpayer (Agriculture Department expenditures rose from $3.2 billion in fiscal 1953 to $7.1 billion in fiscal 1959, including $2.8 billion for price-support operations and $1.2 billion for various conservation programs). See "Farm Surpluses and Food Needs," *E.R.R.*, 1959 Vol. I, pp. 165-180.

sion of the Soil Bank conservation program—the only program endorsed by Democrats, Republicans, and farm owners generally. The Soil Bank program, broadly speaking, involves paying farmers to divert acreage from cash crops to soil-building crops. Economically and politically, this is considered the most desirable way to attack the surplus problem. Payments under soil conservation programs bolster farm income without adding to crop surpluses, while conservation builds up the land for profitable use by future generations.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, most influential of the three major farm organizations, declared at its Chicago convention last December: "The maintenance and improvement of our land resources are of basic importance. . . . As a temporary measure to help farmers in adjusting production to current needs, we favor a properly designed and administered conservation reserve program which (1) retires land that otherwise would be devoted to crops, (2) keeps land out of production for a long term of years, (3) prohibits harvesting of grazing land under the program, (4) encourages farmers to put entire farms in the reserve, (5) secures sufficient participation to reduce production substantially, bringing total agricultural production into balance with domestic and foreign market demand."

Conservation Approach to Surplus Problem

Resort to programs of soil conservation[2] to control the output of agricultural commodities has provoked much controversy. Critics of the present Soil Bank conservation program contend that it has not significantly reduced production because only the poorest land is kept idle; because the resultant increase in grasslands contributes to surplus production of livestock; because soil renewal and erosion control tend to increase the productivity of the land and thus will make ultimately for still larger surpluses.

The critics also cite spectacular increases in yields per acre over the past decade, through use of fertilizers, disease-resistant seed, new machinery and an ever-increasing

[2] "Modern conservation involves proper land use, protection of the soil against erosion and other forms of deterioration, correcting deficiencies of lime and plant nutrients, rebuilding eroded and depleted soils, protecting and improving forests and farm woodland, improving grasslands, conserving moisture for crop use, reducing flood and sediment damage, improving the quality and regularity of water yields, installing proper agricultural drainage and irrigation, and increasing crop yields and income all at the same time."—Ezra T. Benson, *Farmers at the Crossroads* (1956), p. 82.

number of more efficient methods of farming, as proof that production controls of any kind are to a large extent self-defeating. The effect is to encourage farmers to find ways to produce more on the land left in cultivation and so perhaps entirely offset the loss of production from acreage not tilled.[3]

The so-called conservation reserve of the Soil Bank program nevertheless has vigorous supporters. Rep. H. Carl Andersen (R Minn.), ranking minority member of the agriculture subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, told the House last June 30:

> The strongest criticism of the reserve is that it has not gone far enough. . . . Farms on which all the crop land has been placed in the reserve, commonly called whole-farm participation, account for taking out of production 1.8 million acres of wheat, cotton, peanuts, rice and tobacco. The Department of Agriculture estimates that the cost of price support for commodities normally grown on the 23 million acres in the program would be more than twice as much as the cost of the conservation reserve; all of the 23 million acres will be protected by grass, trees, or special plantings for wildlife. Over 15 million acres of the total will be planted to grass and almost 1.9 million acres to trees. Cover especially for the improvement of wildlife habitat will go on 165,000 acres.

Secretary Benson, who has made frequent demands for an expanded conservation program, said in a speech at Des Moines on Feb. 17, 1956, that the "only sound way" to deal with surpluses was through the Soil Bank.

Soil Bank Program to Help Reduce Surpluses

Half a dozen or more soil conservation programs have been instituted under federal auspices at different times for different purposes. The Department of Agriculture carries on soil conservation activities under several programs and through several agencies. The conservation reserve of the Soil Bank was established by the Agricultural Act of 1956. That legislation authorized the proffer of incentives to farmers to hold land out of production.[4] The program is voluntary. A participating farmer agrees not to cultivate stipulated acreage for a period of up to 10 years. In return, the government makes annual payments

[3] While approximately 20 million fewer acres of wheat were planted in 1959 than in 1949, yields per acre were more than 30 per cent greater. As a result, the surplus of 1.4 billion bushels on Nov. 30, 1959, was still more than twice annual consumption.

[4] The conservation reserve was coupled originally with an acreage reserve. The acreage reserve program, under which payments were made to farmers for withdrawal of land from production of specified basic commodities like wheat and corn, was allowed to expire by limitation in mid-1959.

during the period of the contract and shares the cost of introducing conservation practices. The purpose is not only to reduce total production but also to put idled crop land into forage, trees, and water storage.

Approximately 246,000 conservation reserve contracts were in effect during the 1959 crop season. The contracts covered 22.4 million acres, about 5 per cent of all harvested crop land, at an annual rental averaging $11.53 an acre. About two-thirds of the total acreage thus put into the Soil Bank represented whole-farm units; that is, all crop land of the farms in question was taken out of production.[5]

The Agriculture Department's Commodity Stabilization Service, which administers the Soil Bank, has asserted that the land in the conservation reserve in 1959 would normally have produced large quantities of farm commodities to add to existing surpluses. A C.S.S. survey showed that 3.7 million acres in the reserve formerly devoted to corn would have produced 143 million bushels if cultivated. The reserve included also more than 3.6 million acres formerly devoted to grain sorghums and 2.4 million acres of former wheat land. The fact that nearly two million acres of these lands had been turned over to foresting was regarded as encouraging, for forested acres are likely to remain out of commodity production for a long time, perhaps permanently.

Reactions to Soil Bank's Conservation Reserve

Farm organizations have supported the Soil Bank reserve because it adds to the income of individual farmers and enables them to hold onto their land until it can be put to profitable use. However, since a Soil Bank farmer who puts his whole farm into the reserve no longer needs bank credit and stops purchasing seeds, fertilizer and farm machinery, many small town businessmen have voiced opposition to the plan.

One of the shortcomings of the Soil Bank is that farmers put their poorer acres into it. Samuel Lubell, criticizing the program in the Scripps-Howard newspapers on Aug. 6, 1959, said that older people who owned poor land stood out as the largest single group of participants in the pro-

[5] Special incentives are offered on this type of contract because it removes the entire production potential of the farm and leaves no land for more intensive farming. A farmer who places all his crop land in the reserve can continue to live on the farm, maintain a home garden, and use the permanent pasture and orchard land.

gram. Lubell pointed out that 60 per cent of the participants were over 55 years of age. An elderly Iowa couple told him they put their farm into the reserve because "The land was tired and so were we."

Joseph Campbell, Comptroller General of the United States, accused the Department of Agriculture on Jan. 6, 1960, of wasteful handling of the Soil Bank program. Campbell asserted that nearly one-fourth of the land placed in the conservation reserve had not previously been used to grow crops on a regular basis; 5.4 million acres rented by the government "had been devoted to hay and pasture, had been idled or summer-fallowed, or had a history of crop failure." [6] There are signs that the amount of productive land withdrawn from cultivation is gradually increasing, but it is recognized that much more good land has to be put into the Soil Bank before a real dent in the surplus problem will be made by this means.

A.C.P. Plan for Conserving Farm Resources

Another Department of Agriculture endeavor in soil conservation—the Agricultural Conservation Program—has nothing to do with control of production. It is a program by which the government promotes soil and water conservation activities by sharing the costs, up to an average of 50 per cent, with farmers and ranchers. The program, during the five years it has been in operation, has helped to put about 22 million acres of land under vegetative cover and has provided guidance and assistance in restoring and improving soil fertility, minimizing erosion, and conserving water supples.

Although $250 million was made available for A.C.P. projects in the 1960 crop year, the President's budget for fiscal 1961 proposed a reduction to $100 million for the next crop year. According to the budget statement, the program in future will be directed "toward conservation measures . . . which will contribute to less intensive use of crop land." Measures contributing to "an early increase in production" will be curtailed or eliminated. Projects in the past have ranged from planting stands of trees or shrubs to prevent erosion to construction of sediment re-

[6] The Agriculture Department has reported that four million more acres of crop land were harvested in 1959 than in 1958—this despite addition of 12.6 million acres to the conservation reserve and a shift of one million acres to commercial and industrial uses. The increase in planted acreage was attributed mainly to lapse of the acreage reserve program and termination of acreage allotments on corn production.—U.S.D.A., *Statistical Summary*, Dec. 23, 1959, p. 1.

tention dams, pits, or ponds to prevent gullying by retarding water runoff.

ACTIVITIES OF THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Unlike the Soil Bank or the Agricultural Conservation Program, the Soil Conservation Service gives no financial assistance of any kind. It is responsible for developing and carrying out a national program of conservation of land and water resources. The agency supervises the National Cooperative Soil Survey, administers the Great Plains Conservation Program, and gives technical assistance on such matters as watershed and river basin planning, plant technology and flood prevention structures.

The primary job of S.C.S.'s 14,300 employees is to help farmers and ranchers, individually or in groups, carry out conservation work on the land. This assistance is provided principally through 2,800 locally organized soil conservation districts embracing more than 1.6 billion acres. Each district is directed by an unsalaried local board.

Technicians give direct assistance to farmers. First, a soil scientist makes a detailed, acre-by-acre soil survey of the farm or ranch. A soil conservationist follows up with information to the farmer about practical alternatives for treatment and use of the land. When a plan of action has been decided upon, technicians help in applying those parts of the plan that require special skills or knowledge. Finally, the technicians may offer suggestions later for improving the original conservation plan. Last year 1.2 million farmers cooperated with soil conservation districts in planning conservation programs at a cost to the federal government of about $82 million.[7]

The Great Plains Conservation Program is a semi-autonomous operation under the Soil Conservation Service. It was set up by Congress in 1956 in the wake of a six-year drought in the ten Great Plains states—Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.[8] The program is designed to help farmers and ranchers in the 10 states

[7] The Soil Conservation Service reported on Dec. 14, 1959, that in the past year 1.6 million acres of range had been seeded; 3 million acres of pasture planted; 67 thousand ponds constructed; 46 thousand miles of terracing built; and more than a million acres of trees planted.

[8] The Great Plains, covering about 400 million acres, have relatively light rainfall. Drought is experienced every year in some part of the area, and about every 20 years an extended drought turns a large part of the region into a dust bowl.

to make land use adjustments as well as to plan and install the soil and water conservation measures needed to achieve a more stable agriculture.

Sixty per cent of the nation's wheat is grown on the semi-arid plains, but most of the land there cannot sustain continuous cultivation without serious soil erosion. President Eisenhower pointed out on Jan. 11, 1956, that "Some of the most critical problems of the area are the outgrowth of war when farmers . . . greatly increased production to meet wartime demands by converting grasslands to cultivation."

Continuation of wartime production incentives, long after the emergency demand ended, made it profitable for farmers to go on growing wheat on much of this acreage. Only recently, through the combined influence of the Soil Bank, the cost-sharing assistance of the Agricultural Conservation Program, and the conservation measures of S.C.S., has a small start been made toward withdrawing land from cultivation of a crop of which there is already an abundant surplus.[9]

Rise of Soil Conservation Movement

INTEREST in soil conservation grew out of the general conservation movement that got under way in the 1890s and early 1900s. A policy of conserving timber, water and mineral resources became firmly established during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt, but soil conservation was ignored at that time. As long as vast areas of fertile land were available for exploitation, the public was not concerned about soil losses or soil deterioration. Maintenance and improvement of soil were regarded as a concern of the individual farmer, not a matter of public interest requiring federal action.[10]

It was not until the 1920s that farm leaders and farm journals began to emphasize the need of safeguarding and

[9] The Great Plains program went into operation in 1957. At the end of two years 3,473 farmers and ranchers had entered about 10 million acres in the program.—Cyril Luker, "Great Plains Conservation Program," *Soil Conservation*, January 1960, p. 124.

[10] Murray R. Benedict, *Can We Solve the Farm Problem?* (1955), p. 321.

building up soils. The rising concern over soil deterioration and losses in soil fertility led Congress in 1929 to appropriate the sum of $160,000 to investigate soil erosion. Studies then initiated brought national recognition of the seriousness of soil depletion and the need of federal action. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, coupling interest in conservation with a desire to stimulate employment in the Great Depression, moved to initiate erosion-control projects as a form of unemployment relief.[11]

The Soil Erosion Service, first national soil conservation agency, was created in 1933 as a branch of the Public Works Administration to handle a vast network of erosion control projects. After attaining the status of a bureau in the Department of the Interior, S.E.S. in 1935 was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and converted into the Soil Conservation Service. The Soil Conservation Act of 1935 made it the duty of S.C.S. to develop and administer a broad federal program of soil conservation.

When the Supreme Court invalidated the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1936, Congress enacted substitute legislation as an amendment to the Soil Conservation Act of 1935. The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 had virtually the same objective as the invalidated act—to raise farm prices by reducing crop surpluses—but instead of basing benefits paid to farmers on withdrawal of land from production of specified commodities, it made the benefits conditional on shifting land from soil-depleting crops like wheat, corn and cotton to soil-conserving crops like grasses, legumes and forage which would protect and rebuild the soil.

Soil conservation was directly linked with production control again 20 years later, when the Agricultural Act of 1956 created the Soil Bank and offered farmers income protection during readjustment of production of crops in surplus supply.

T.V.A.'s Experimental Conservation Program

The Tennessee Valley Authority's soil conservation program, a pioneer project covering a seven-state area, was

---

[11] A survey in 1934 indicated that erosion had badly damaged more than 280 million acres of crop and grazing land and adversely affected an additional total of 775 million acres. A primary natural resource was being destroyed at a rate which threatened the future welfare of the nation.—Soil Conservation Service, *Our American Land* (1950), p. 4.

started before the Soil Conservation Service came into existence. Emphasis of this continuing program has been on research in manufacture of fertilizers and on educational work at demonstration farms. Fertilizers produced under the project are first given laboratory tests at agricultural experiment stations of colleges in the area. Results of the tests are made known to county farm advisers, who call the farmers of a community together to explain the project. A group thus organized selects a farm for the demonstration, and T.V.A. supplies the fertilizer and all necessary technical assistance.

More than 72,000 demonstration farms, comprising more than 10 million acres of land, have taken part in this program since 1935. However, the program has come under criticism in Congress because it duplicates some activities of the Soil Conservation Service and the Rural Development Program. The Rural Development Program, begun by the Department of Agriculture on an experimental basis in 1955 and subsequently extended to 200 counties in 30 states, is a national effort to improve the economic position of small, mostly non-commercial farmers. Effective soil, forest, and water conservation practices are encouraged as keystones to farm betterment, but the program is directed also to increasing the income of families in the group by widening the range of off-farm job opportunities.

Soil Reclamation and Agricultural Surpluses

Complaints have been voiced recently at simultaneous pursuit of federal programs to increase and to decrease the area of land in production. The Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior has been bringing an annual average of 175,000 formerly untillable acres into cultivation, while the Department of Agriculture has been spending billions of dollars every year to take acreage out of production and bolster prices of crops in over-supply.

The National Grange asserted in November 1958 that there was "no need to spend funds for large reclamation projects which would increase present surpluses and also use land resources that should be conserved." A year later, in December 1959, the American Farm Bureau Federation recommended that "Irrigation phases of federal multi-purpose reclamation projects which would bring new land into production be postponed until needed." A recent staff report of the Senate-House Economic Committee ex-

pressed a similar view in declaring that "With an excess of arable land clearly evident, the federal government should cease to add to this excess through reclamation, except where other pressing social purposes are served or where economic feasibility can be clearly demonstrated."

Supporters of reclamation see no inconsistency between the different government programs. Sen. James E. Murray (D Mont.) contended in a letter to Sen. Paul H. Douglas (D Ill.), chairman of the Joint Economic Committee, on Jan. 19 that the proposal in the committee's staff report was "contrary to the principles of a growing and balanced economy for the United States."

Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Reclamation in mid-July 1959 indicated that irrigated land in reclamation projects did not make a large overall contribution to national crop surpluses. The eight million acres of reclaimed and irrigated land accounted for only 1.5 per cent of the country's 1958 wheat crop and for 7.7 per cent of the crop of short-staple cotton.[12] No tobacco was grown. Farming on reclaimed land is devoted primarily to such cash crops as fruits and vegetables, which do not compete with the crops in surplus supply.

Future of Soil Conservation Programs

SOIL, water, and forest resources form the base of the nation's economy. They supply the country's food and most of its clothing, paper, fiber, and construction materials. Protection of these resources obviously is essential to the material welfare, if not the very existence, of future generations. However, in the drafting of conservation programs the benefits to be gained in the long run by the country as a whole have sometimes taken second place to such immediate aims as providing jobs for the unemployed or ameliorating a crop surplus situation. The importance of conservation itself—of making prudent use of soil and timber resources, preventing floods, protecting wildlife, and opening up new recreational areas—often is overlooked.

[12] Wheat from reclamation projects that was under Commodity Credit Corporation loan or in the C.C.C. inventory amounted to 1 per cent of the wheat under the price-support program; cotton from reclamation projects amounted to 6.8 per cent of the cotton under loan or in the inventory.

Conservation is essential in maintaining an adequate water supply. Shortsightedness of American farmers, road builders, ranchers, and loggers in exploitation of the land has caused excessive runoff and seriously depleted underground water resources. Water requirements have risen to 250 billion gallons a day for domestic needs, irrigation, and industrial use and are expected to double in the next two decades.[13] This anticipated expansion will require adoption of careful planning and conservation measures in many parts of the country.

The Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture plays a leading role in conservation of the nation's timber resources. More than a million acres of forest land are reforested annually or benefited by other forms of timber stand improvement. In addition, in cooperation with the Soil Bank, the Forest Service since 1956 has provided trees to plant more than a million acres of land put into the conservation reserve. Timber cut from national forests sold for $112 million in 1959 and placed Forest Service operations on a self-supporting basis.

Maintenance of the national forests, conservation steps taken on the Great Plains, and development of the Soil Bank's conservation reserve have contributed to a current increase of fish and wildlife. Rabbits, grouse, quail, pheasants, doves and other wildlife grown on farms provide most of the game of American hunters. When farmers and ranchers apply soil and water conservation practices, such as strip cropping, pond construction, hedges, and tree planting, more wildlife appears. For example, ponds that are properly designed can produce 100 to 300 pounds of fish per acre each year for hook and line fishing. Farmers in soil conservation districts stock about 55,000 of these ponds annually.

Current Proposals to Enlarge the Soil Bank

Life magazine asserted editorially on Dec. 14, 1959, that the farm program was a "proven failure." Paradoxically, it is a failure marked by efficient and abundant production. The program has been unsuccessful because it has not brought a reduction of unsalable surpluses. However, the $10 billion inventory of crop surpluses has redeeming aspects. The National Farmers Union has observed in an

[13] See "Water Needs and Resources," *E.R.R.*, 1959 Vol. II, pp. 742-743.

undated program bulletin titled *Food for Peace*: "United States agricultural production has made it possible for citizens of the United States to be the best fed in the world. The ability of farmers to produce is a blessing in terms of moral and humanitarian considerations." [14]

The country's surplus headaches have been steadily getting worse because farm output has been outstripping the growth of population. William M. Blair pointed out in a *New York Times* feature article on Jan. 11, 1960, that during the 1950s the population expanded at a rate of 1.8 per cent a year, while farm output, spurred by huge yield per acre increases, rose by 2.25 per cent annually. Although the surplus constitutes only 5 to 7 per cent of total agricultural production, it seems unlikely that the United States can "eat its way" out of the problem, for 85 per cent of the federal inventory of price-supported commodities is concentrated in three crops: wheat, corn and cotton.

To prevent the production-consumption gap from widening, the Department of Agriculture hopes to add nine million acres to the Soil Bank's conservation reserve during the 1961 crop year. Its goal is to retire a total of 37 million of the country's 350 million acres of harvested land by the end of the next year.[15] Rep. H. Carl Andersen told the House last June 30:

> The Center for Agricultural Adjustment at Iowa State College recently reported that at least 45 million acres should be retired to balance production with consumption. If we want to reduce surpluses, we must go even further. The goal we should be aiming at should be at least 60 million acres taken out of production. A goal of as much as 80 million acres would cost $1.32 billion a year against costs of $2.5 billion now estimated for allotments, quotas, storage and disposal.

Rep. Albert H. Quie (R Minn.) said in the House on Jan. 7 that "We should remove not necessarily the greatest number of acres, but the more productive acres, in order to cut down the surplus." Rep. Andersen has suggested that as the number of acres of crop land placed in the conservation reserve increases, the average productivity of the land in the reserve will increase—"The poorer land

[14] Sen. Hugh Scott (R Pa.) told the Senate, May 22, 1959, that more than three billion pounds of surplus foods were being given away, at home and abroad, during the fiscal year 1959. "Surplus foods donated through the program were used during this period by more than 14 million school children taking part in school lunch programs, and by about 1.4 million persons in charitable institutions. In addition, they were being distributed in March [1959] to 5,741,296 needy persons in this country."

[15] The American Farm Bureau Federation said, Jan. 31, that the target should be 60 million acres by the end of the crop year 1965.

goes in first, and the better land follows." An expanded program therefore may be expected to be increasingly effective in adjusting production.

The Committee for Economic Development observed more than two years ago: "A basic difficulty is that the Soil Bank is not devoted to the one single objective of reducing production. Many see it as a form of crop insurance. Others see it as a soil conservation program. And almost everyone connected with it regards it as a means of contributing to farmer income." The C.E.D. suggested that the action of Congress in placing a limit on the amount of conservation reserve payments to any one farmer annually indicated clearly that Soil Bank payments were regarded, not as a means of reducing surpluses, but as a method of augmenting income.[16]

President Eisenhower pointed out in his budget message for fiscal 1961 that "Authority to bring additional land into the conservation reserve expires after the 1960 crop year." The President recommended that the authority be extended through the 1963 crop year, and that the program be expanded by raising the limitation on total conservation reserve payments in a calendar year from $450 million to $600 million.

A large sign-up last autumn included nearly 103,000 applications to place approximately 9.6 million new acres in the conservation reserve. Lack of funds to finance so large an addition made it possible that no more than five million new acres could be placed in the reserve this year. That number would bring the total to around 27-28 million acres.

Mandatory Soil Conservation to Cut Surpluses

A mandatory, instead of a voluntary, Soil Bank as a means to curtail production was proposed in Chicago, Dec. 18, by William J. Kuhfuss, head of the 194,000-member Illinois Agricultural Association of the American Farm Bureau Federation. In departing from traditional Farm Bureau opposition to compulsory controls, Kuhfuss said that a mandatory Soil Bank "not only will take land out of production, but it will take surplus grain from the government stocks." The Kuhfuss plan would require a referendum among farmers. If two-thirds approved, the government

[16] Committee for Economic Development, *Toward a Realistic Farm Program* (December 1957), p. 33. The original $3,000 limit on conservation reserve payments was raised to $5,000 last year.

would compel each farmer to withdraw a certain percentage of crop land from production and plant clover on the idled soil. Farmers would not be paid for putting this land into the reserve, but, if they diverted additional acreage, the government would give them compensation "in kind"; that is, the farmers would receive surplus grain, and surplus stocks held by the Commodity Credit Corporation would be correspondingly reduced.[17] Kuhfuss asserted that taking out another 10 per cent of crop land would eliminate surplus production.

A publication of the Izaak Walton League of America, a non-profit society which has long advocated an adequate conservation program, declared in a recent editorial: "Obviously if all lands were retired there would be no surplus. There is a point of land retirement that will eliminate the surplus and establish a demand for crops produced firm enough to support farm operations without supports. Reaching and maintaining that point is the goal of the conservation reserve approach to farm policy." [18]

President Eisenhower, pleading in his budget message for modification of farm price support laws, said that "The longer unrealistic price supports are retained, the more difficult it will be to make the adjustments in production needed to permit relaxation of government controls over farm operations." However, the question of price supports is so closely tied up with politics that passage this year of pertinent legislation that would be deemed satisfactory by the administration is unlikely. As a result, there may be all the more pressure for expansion of the Soil Bank's conservation reserve, but participation is certain to be kept on a voluntary basis.

[17] The Agriculture Department reported Jan. 7, 1960, that the C.C.C. had 1.4 billion bushels of wheat worth $3.4 billion, as well as 1.4 billion bushels of corn worth $2.4 billion, in its inventory on Nov. 30, 1959.

[18] *Outdoor America*, December 1959, p. 4.